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## Hopwood teachers complain about principal, vice principal

By Gemma Q. Casas  
Variety News Staff

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A group of teachers at Hopwood Junior High School have complained to the Public School System about their Principal Jim Brewer and Vice Principal Beth Nepaial for allegedly mistreating and belittling them. But Dr. David Borja, education deputy commissioner and former Hopwood principal, defended Brewer and Nepaial, saying the two only want the best for the school and its students.

The teachers and some staff members totaling 26 in all have signed a "letter of concern" relating to their superiors. PSS had since started a mediation process.

Nariany Sikyang, a school counselor who spoke on behalf of the group, claimed their principal is allegedly harassing them and belittling teachers from the Philippines and Micronesia.

"Some of the issues have to do with harassment. [These] are going to be dealt individually by the teachers with their lawyers. Right now, I'm seeking my own lawyer, Robert Torres [the former Attorney General]," said Sikyang.

She also expressed disappointment over PSS's alleged slow action on their case. "We haven't heard anything. We're still waiting.... This is the way they are treating us," she told Variety.

Borja said PSS had assigned personnel director Charlie Kenty to act as mediator between the Hopwood management and the opposing staff members.

### Working progress

He said Kenty is still compiling data and is expected to come up with a full report to be submitted to Education Commissioner Rita H. Inos.

"He's still in the process of gathering data. The commissioner has tasked him to resolve the issue," he said.

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Exhibit "P"

Borja theorized that the dispute between Sikyang's group and Brewer's management style may have stemmed from miscommunication.

Brewer is allegedly calling the attention of school staff members to many issues through memorandums which are strongly worded.

Sikyang, for instance, narrated that she was removed from the school's leadership team because the principal allegedly didn't like her behavior during their latest meeting and interpreted it as disinterest on her part.

"It was so crowded that I sat (at the end of the room) They were telling me that I should sit there. It was so crowded that I sat (where there was an available space).... Are they psychologists that they know what my body language says? They have stricken me out from the leadership team," she said.

She added that their school administrators do not seem happy when they voice their opinions on school issues.

"In that meeting, if you voice your opinion you get scolded," she said.

But Borja said Brewer, a former prison facility director in California, only wants things done right to further improve the quality of education for Hopwood students.

Borja, who recommended Brewer and Nepaial for their current administrative posts, said the two are also not the type of persons who would belittle people because of their ethnic origin.

"He (Brewer) is the most qualified man for the position (of a school principal). He came to Saipan as a teacher to help troubled youths and students in need of special attention," he said.

"He's one of the nicest persons I've met. He believes in giving people more than second chances," he added.

The education official expressed hope that the differences between management and the teachers at Hopwood will soon be over.

"In my personal and professional opinion that there is a need for communication to take place. Hopefully, the mediation that Mr. (Charlie) Kenty is now working on will bring that solution," said Borja.

Sikyang also led the group of teachers in 1999 to pressure PSS to reassign its then principal, Lou Mendiola, to another school.

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## BOE chair to PSS: Speed up decision on Hopwood dispute

By Gemma Q. Casas  
Variety News Staff

BOARD of Education Chairman Roman Benavente is calling on the Public School System to speed up the investigation on the ongoing dispute between the management of Hopwood Junior High School and over two dozen staff members and some teachers. Benavente said he spoke with several classroom teachers who asked not to be identified and was told there is animosity between the two opposing camps and the students may eventually suffer in their battle.

"The situation is that there is animosity. The students are being victimized so I want PSS to resolve this issue as soon as possible," said the board chairman.

The group of Hopwood student counselor Nariany Sikyang brought their "concerns" about the school's management as early as November last year.

Education Commissioner Rita H. Inos, meanwhile, said the personnel director of PSS, Charlie Kenty, who was assigned to be the mediator in the school's dispute, is still conducting interviews.

She says that PSS is on top of the situation and that Kenty will soon be making a recommendation report on the issue.

Under the leadership of current Hopwood Principal Jim Brewer, the school which was previously known for its low assessment scores and campus brawls, made significant progress in its students' academic performance based on the latest Stanford Achievement Test 10th edition results as well as in the CNMI-wide assessment test.

Dr. David Borja, Hopwood's previous principal who is now the education deputy commissioner for administration, said Brewer is the right man for the job and wants only the best for the school.

But Sikyang's group is complaining the school's management is allegedly intimidating and harassing some employees, including herself.

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## PSS to wrap up Hopwood dispute

By Gemma Q. Casas  
Variety News Staff

THE Public School System is near completing the mediation process involving the dispute between the management of Hopwood Junior High School and 26 staff members who are complaining of harassment and intimidation, among other issues. PSS Deputy Commissioner David Borja, Ph. D. said Education Commissioner Rita H. Inos, Ph. D., has personally taken part in the ongoing mediation process to resolve the dispute.

"The commissioner and Mr. (Charlie) Kenty are finishing up the mediation. Before that mediation, there was a meeting between Mr. Kenty, Mr. (Jim) Brewer (the principal) and Ms. (Nariany) Sikyang (Hopwood counselor and spokeswoman for the complaining staff members)," said Borja.

"They now have the understanding that it has to be a joint effort to resolve the situation," he added.

He said Inos is going to meet with Kenty, Brewer, the Hopwood leadership and all those who signed the letter of concern against the school management.

"The mediation process did not come to closure so the commissioner and the leadership of Hopwood are asking for a continuation that is scheduled sometime this week," Borja said.

Sikyang's group is claiming the management is creating a hostile environment for them by allegedly belittling them and subjecting them to intimidation and harassment.

Another victim?

As this developed, a former school aide at Hopwood claims he too was treated unfairly by the school management.

Greg Cruz, a father of six, claims the environment at the school forced him to quit his job last year.

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Cruz claims the school management asked him to work as a security guard, which he said was not specified in his contract as a school aide.

But Borja, who hired Cruz, said working as a security guard would fall under the clause "perform other duties as assigned."

"Mr. Cruz was hired as a school aide which is a para pros (professional) job. One of the requirements is to serve as a school security guard. That's one of his duties," said Borja. Cruz also claims his wife and daughter were allegedly given a hard time entering the campus, something that other visitors were not subjected to.

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## LOCAL

Wednesday, February 09, 2005

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### Inos steps into Hopwood dilemma

By Agnes Donato  
Reporter

Education Commissioner Rita H. Inos has stepped into the mediation process between the school administrators of the Hopwood Junior High School and a group of school personnel led by counselor Nariany Sikyang, according to Public School System associate commissioner David M. Borja.

This came even as Borja insisted that Hopwood "does not have a problem."

Sikyang had filed a complaint against Hopwood principal Jim Brewer and vice principal Beth Nepaial last month for alleged harassment and racism.

Borja said that Inos and PSS personnel director Charlie Kenty met last week to discuss the extent of the mediation process. "They are still finishing up the mediation," Borja said.

That mediation process hasn't ended yet, said Borja, "so the commissioner and the leadership at Hopwood are asking for continuation this week."

Just before Inos and Kenty met, Borja said there was a meeting between Brewer and Sikyang, where both parties were made to understand that there has to be a joint effort to resolve the situation.

Patty Mendoza, one of the four counselors at Hopwood, said that she could not say anything about the issue as all schoolteachers and staff have been advised by the legal counsel to refrain from doing so.

Sikyang, according to her, has been on leave since last week.

In a related story, Greg Cruz, a former school aide at Hopwood, followed up on his complaint against Brewer, which he filed last year. He accused the administration of breaching his contract; he claims that he was hired as a teacher aide, not school aide. Cruz said in his complaint that he was forced to perform tasks designated for security guards in school. Cruz presented his case to the PSS board last year.

Borja said the board cannot help Cruz now since he resigned from the school. He said he was the one who hired Cruz at that time when he was still Hopwood's principal. He insisted that Cruz was hired as a school aide, not a teacher aide.

Borja said that as school aide, Cruz's job description includes supervision during bus loading and unloading of students, taking care of the study hall, lunch halls and playgrounds. He was also tasked to assist teachers during field trips and extra-curricular activities. He was also responsible in the arrangement of classrooms for meetings and other assembly. As school aide he should run test materials and sheet for teachers and perform other related duties as assigned.

Borja said the task of providing security in school could fall on other tasks as assigned to him. He said this issue should be considered carefully. "We should take a look at the reasons behind all these things," he said. (Marconi Calindas)

Back to top  



## LOCAL

Tuesday, January 25, 2005

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HJHS teachers: It's all a lie'

By Marconi Calindas  
Reporter

Several Hopwood Junior High School teachers, including some support staff, are crying foul over recent reports of teacher complaints against school principal Jim Brewer and vice principal Beth Nepaial, saying the people behind the complaints do not represent them.

This arose after the Public School System received a signed petition alleging of "mistreatment and belittling" of teachers and staff, supposedly by Brewer and Nepaial.

School counselor Nariany Sikyang reportedly led the signature drive.

"The counselor did not have the majority's approval on that petition," said the teachers, who agreed to speak yesterday on condition of anonymity.

The teachers said that the signature drive only gathered 26 signatures and not all of them were of teachers.

Hopwood has a total of 82 employees, over 50 of which are teachers; the rest are administrative and support staff.

"So it's not the majority," the teachers said.

The Saipan Tribune tried to obtain comments from Sikyang but she was unavailable as of press time. Brewer and Nepaial have refused to comment on the allegations on the advice of the PSS legal counsel.

The teachers said that Sikyang asked for their signatures during instruction hours, when they were preoccupied with teaching or other matters. They alleged that she even asked for a maintenance employee who barely reads and write to sign the petition, not explaining what he was signing and for what purpose.

"Three teachers already complained that Sikyang asked them to sign the petition while holding on to other papers. When these teachers read the letter, they wanted to erase their signatures, but Sikyang refused to have their names removed. The three teachers felt that they were tricked," one of the teachers said.

These teachers insist that Brewer and Nepaial do not harass nor belittle teachers at Hopwood. "If they are mistreating or discriminating against ethnicity, they would not have hired Asian instructors," said one of the foreign teachers.

A local teacher said that majority of the teachers did not buy Sikyang's story.

On the issue of the Hopwood principal issuing memoranda, they said that these are basically warnings or sanction letters intended to discipline some teachers and staff who



mostly have problems with punctuality.

As for Sikyang's allegation that she was made to sit on a corner during a meeting, the teachers attested that she was the one who chose to sit on the corner as there were two to three vacant seats available during that meeting.

She was also taken from the leadership committee due to professional reasons, according to them.

"All false. It was all a lie!" said one teacher. "The other paper should have verified facts first before they wrote that," she added.

She alleged that the students and parents are being used and that Sikyang should have consulted the school administration first before going to the media.

"We have our own code of ethics as teachers in the school," another teacher said.

The teachers described Brewer as "an honorable man."

"He is humble and generous and keep a low profile," said the teachers.

PSS associate commissioner David M. Borja also vouched for Brewer, saying he is a most qualified man and not the type who would belittle any staff due to ethnic origin.

The teachers said that they agreed to the interview to let the public know that "majority of the teachers believe that their greatest concern are the children, and that Hopwood remains one of the best schools, if not the best junior high schools in the CNMI."

Back to top  

## LOCAL

Sunday, January 30, 2005

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Sikyang defends self, says concerns are valid

By Marconi Calindas  
Reporter

Hopwood Junior High School counselor Nariany Sikyang, who set off a firestorm of controversy at the school with her allegations of discrimination by the school's top officials, has expressed disappointment with some of her fellow teachers who have disputed her claims, saying she has documents to prove her accusations.

"Why is it they didn't identify themselves, they didn't mention their names," she said referring to the four teachers who organized an interview with the media last week but requested anonymity. "They have issues within themselves. They're taking it personally and are attacking me through the media."

Sikyang, who came out with her allegations in a "letter of concern" to the Public School System administration, added that she is a secure person and if she were lying, the Education commissioner wouldn't have entertained her concern.

"Our concerns are valid," she said.

Besides Sikyang, 26 other teachers and staff of Hopwood signed the letter that accuses school principal Jim Brewer and vice principal Beth Nepaial of racial discrimination and unprofessional conduct. PSS has already begun an investigation on the issue.

Sikyang said the teachers who defended the Hopwood administration are friends of Nepaial. She also claimed that she has documents to prove her allegations.

She explained that she went directly to the media and PSS because she felt that every time she brought up issues with the Hopwood administration, it seemed as if they ignored and did not value her concerns, telling her that what she was raising were mere perceptions. "Like they're not true," she said. "I want people to know what's going on in Hopwood. Why would I hide what is not right?"

Board of Education chair Roman C. Benavente said he met with PSS associate commissioner David M. Borja last Wednesday to briefly discuss the situation at Hopwood. Benavente said that PSS is taking this matter seriously to determine whether there is any truth to the allegations. He said PSS needs to resolve the Hopwood issue, whether there is merit to the complaint or not.

He said that PSS Human Resource Office personnel director Charlie Kenty is still gathering more data due to complexities of the issues raised.

"We are dealing with personnel issues here," said Borja, expressing belief that the main problem is communication. "It is important to find a resolution."

He said that some of the teachers who did not sign the petition have approached him and

affirmed Sikyang's allegations against Brewer and Nepaial. These teachers who did not sign the letter of concern were afraid of the school administration, Borja said, expressing sadness on this matter.

Despite this, Borja pointed out that Sikyang had undergone special trainings on how to handle changes, disputes, and grievance processes as a counselor. He believes that Sikyang should have applied what she has learned from the trainings she had attended.

Sikyang also said that she was not happy when the school administration terminated her from the leadership committee. But Borja said that Sikyang "is an educator, a counselor. Though she was asked to step down from the leadership committee, the fact still remains that she still is a leader of the school."

Sikyang has alleged that she and colleagues are being discriminated against because of their ethnic origin and the fact that English is only a second language for them.

Borja, who had recommended Brewer and Nepaial to the school, said, he could not believe the two would do such a thing. He said that if these were true then he would side with her but Brewer is married to a Mexican-American and Nepaial is married to a local.

"They would not have hired other teachers of ethnic origin if the administration is discriminatory," said Borja.

He stressed that PSS hires teachers based on their qualifications, not race or color, although basic requirements still need to be considered such as U.S. citizenship and a college degree. "We hire teachers based on their abilities, not on what their ethnicity is," he said.

Sikyang said, though, that she is confident that parents are going to support them in this cause.

Inos earlier said that all this commotion is hurting the children but Sikyang pointed out that "if the teachers are happy, the students are going to be happy. That's my philosophy."

Back to top  

## LOCAL

Monday, January 31, 2005

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### BOE chair acts to resolve 'Hopwood dilemma'

Board of Education chair Roman C. Benavente said the "harassment and belittling" case filed by Hopwood Junior High School teachers against their principal and his deputy should be resolved as soon as possible.

"I'm not making a comment until now. We just want to resolve the problem, whether there's merit to the complaint or not... This is my burden for the week," said Benavente.

He went on to say that some of the teachers who did not sign the petition for fear of reprisals approached him last week and confirmed the misbehavior of Hopwood principal Jim Brewer and vice principal Beth Nepaia.

Benavente also revealed that PSS Human Resource Office personnel director Charlie Kenty tried to mediate between the two parties but admitted he hasn't received the results of the meeting.

"I don't know if it went through completely," said Benavente. He is expected to meet with associate commissioner David M. Borja this morning to find out the extent of the investigation.

Benavente also said that the "Hopwood dilemma" has affected the interest of the children.

"The interest of the children are disrupted by this animosity," he said. "That is why we have to resolve this issue immediately." (Marconi Calindas)

Back to top  